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THE  
LIFE OF GOD  
IN THE  
O U L OF M A N:  
OR THE  
NATURE and EXCELLENCY  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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ABRIDGED  
By JOHN WESLEY, M. A.  
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Alienated from the Life of GOD. Eph. iv. 18,  
I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I,  
but Christ liveth in me. Gal. ii. 20.  
For as many as are led by the Spirit of GOD, they are  
the Sons of GOD. Rom. viii. 14.  
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SIXTH EDITION  
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LONDON:

Printed for GEORGE WHITFIELD City-Road, and sold at the Me-  
thodist Preaching-Houses in Town and Country. 1797.

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PRICE FOUR-PENCE.



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T H E

LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL OF MAN.

I Cannot speak of religion,\* but I must lament that among so many pretenders to it, so few understand it means; some placing it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions; and all the account they give of their religion is, that they are of this, or the other persuasion, and have joined themselves to one of those sects whereinto Christendom is most unhappily divided: others place it in the outward man, in a constant state of external duties, and a mode of performances; they live peaceably with their neighbours, keep a temperate diet, observe the returns of worship, frequenting the church, or their closet, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, they think they have sufficiently acquitted themselves: others again put all religion in the affections, in rapturous heats and ecstatic devotion; and all they aim at is, to pray with passion, and to think of heaven with pleasure; and to be affected with those sweet and melting expressions wherewith they court theiraviour till they persuade themselves that they are mightily in love with him. Thus are these things, which have any resemblance of piety, and, at best are but means for obtaining it, or particular exercises of it, frequently mistaken for the whole of religion; nay, sometimes wickedness and vice pretend to that name. I speak not now of those gross impieties wherewith the heathens were wont to worship their gods; there are but too many christians, who would consecrate their vices, and hallow their corrupt affections; whose rugged humour, and sullen pride, must pass for christian severity; whose fierce wrath, and bitter rage against their enemies, must be called holy zeal; whose insolency towards their superiors, or rebellion against their governors, must have the name of christian courage and resolution.

But certainly religion is quite another thing; and they who are acquainted with it, will entertain far different thoughts, and disdain all those shadows and false imitations of it. † They know by experience, that true religion is

\* Mistakes about religion, † What religion is.

an union of the soul with God; a real participation of the divine nature; the very image of God drawn up to the soul; or, in the apostle's phrase, it is *Christ formed in us*. Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed, than by calling it a *divine life*, and under these terms I shall discourse of it, shewing, first, how it is called a *life*, and then, how it is termed *divine*.

3. I chuse to express it by the name of *life*, first, because of its permanency and stability. † Religion is not a sudden start, or passion of the mind; not though it should seem to transport a man to extraordinary performance. There are few but have convictions of the necessity of doing something for the salvation of their souls, which may push them forward some steps with a great deal of haste; but, anon, they flag and give over; they did flourish forth, fresh and high: but are quickly withered, because they had no root in themselves. These sudden fits may be compared to the violent and convulsive motions of bodies newly beheaded; which, however violent and impetuous can be of no long continuance; whereas the motions of holy souls are constant and regular, proceeding from a permanent and lively principle. It is true, this divine life continueth not always in the same strength and vigour, but many times suffers sad decays; yet it is not quite extinguished; nor are holy men abandoned to the power of these corrupt affections, which sway the rest of the world.

4. \* Again, religion may be termed *life*, because it is inward, free, and self moving principle: and those who have it, are not actuated only by external motives, driven merely by threatenings, nor bribed by promises, nor constrained by laws; but are powerfully inclined to that which is good, and delight in the performance of it. The love which a pious man bears to God, and goodness, is not so much by virtue of a command enjoining him to do, as by a new nature instructing and prompting him to it; nor doth he pay his devotions as an unavoidable tribute only to appease the divine justice, or quiet a clamorous conscience, but these religious exercises are the proper enjoyments of the divine life, the natural employments of a new-born soul. He prays, and gives thanks, and repents, not only because these things are commanded, but because he is sensible of his wants, and of the divine goodness, &c.

† Its permanency and stability. \* Its freedom and unconstrainedness.



the folly and misery of a sinful life. His charity is not forced, nor his alms extorted from him; his love makes him willing to give, and, tho' there were no outward obligation, his heart would devise liberal things. Injustice, or intemperance, and all other vices, are as contrary to his temper and constitution, as the basest actions are to the most generous spirit, and impudence and scurrility to those who are naturally modest: so that I may well say with St. John, "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God §: Though religious persons do much eye the law of God, and have a great regard unto it, yet it is not so much the sanction of the law, as its purity and goodness, which prevail with them. They account it excellent and desirable in itself; and that in the keeping of it there is great reward; and that divine love wherewith they are actuated, makes them become a law unto themselves.

*Quis legem det amantibus?*

*Major est amor lex ipse sibi.*

*Who shall prescribe a law to those that love?*

*Love's a more powerful law which doth them move.*

In a word, what our blessed Saviour said of himself, in some measure, applicable to his followers, that it is *their meat and drink to do their Father's will.\** And as the natural appetite is carried out towards food, though we should not reflect on the necessity of it; so are they carried with a natural and unforced propension toward that which is good and commendable. It is true, external motives are of great use to stir up this inward principle, especially in infancy and weakness, when it is often so languid, that man himself can scarce discern it, hardly being able to take one step forward, but when he is pushed by his hopes, his fears; by the pressure of an affliction, or the sense of mercy; by the authority of the law, or the persuasion of others. Yet, if such a person be conscientious and united in his obedience, and earnestly groaning under the weight of his dulness, these are the first motions of the divine life; which, though it be faint and weak, will surely be cherished by the influences of heaven, and grow unto perfect maturity. But he who is utterly destitute of this

§ 1 John iii. 9. \* John iv. 35.

inward principle, and doth not aspire unto it, but contents himself with those performances, whereunto he is prompted by education or custom, by the fear of hell, carnal notions of heaven, can no more be accounted a religious person, than a puppet can be called a man. The forced and artificial religion is commonly heavy and languid like the motion of a weight forced upward. It is scarce and niggardly, especially in those duties, which do violence to men's inclinations; for those slavish spirits will be faine to do no more than is absolutely required: it is a law that compels them, and they will be loth to go beyond what it stints them to; nay, they will ever be putting such gloss on it, as may leave them the greatest liberty. Whereas the spirit of true religion is frank and liberal, far from such peevish and narrow reckoning; and he, who hath given himself entirely unto God, will never think he doth too much for him.

§ By this time, I hope it appears, that religion is, what reason termed a *life*, or vital principle; and that we are to distinguish betwixt it and that obedience which is contracted, and depends upon external causes. I come next to give an account why I term it *divine life*: and so it may be called, not only in regard of its fountain and origin, having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men, by the power of his Holy Spirit; but also in regard of its nature, religion being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man; nay, it is the real participation of his nature, it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness; and they, who are endued with it, may be said to have God *dwelling in their souls*, and *Christ formed within them*.

7. Before I descend to a more particular consideration of this divine life, it will perhaps be fit to speak a little of that \* natural or animal life which prevails in those who are strangers to the other: and by this I understand nothing else, but our inclination and propension toward those things, which are pleasing and acceptable to nature, or to love, issuing forth and spreading itself into as many branches as men have several appetites and inclinations. The nature and foundation of the animal life I reckon to be sufficiently taking it largely, as it is opposed unto faith, and import

§ Religion a divine Principle. \* What the natural life is.

our

perception and resentment of things, that are either  
 useful or troublesome to us. Now these animal affections  
 considered in themselves, and as they are implanted in us by  
 nature, are not vicious or blameable; nay, they are in-  
 stances of the wisdom of the Creator, furnishing his crea-  
 tures with such appetites, as tend to the preservation and  
 continuance of their lives. These are instead of a law to the  
 beasts, whereby they are directed towards the ends  
 which they were made. But man, being made for  
 other purposes, and to be guided by more excellent laws,  
 becomes criminal when he is transported by the inclinations  
 of his lower life, to neglect the more noble designs of his  
 higher. Our natural affections are not wholly to be de-  
 nied, but only to be moderated and over-ruled by a  
 more excellent principle, and the difference betwixt a re-  
 sonable and wicked man is, that in the one the divine life  
 prevails, in the other, the animal doth prevail.

But it is strange to observe, unto what different  
 uses this natural principle will sometimes carry those  
 who are wholly guided by it, according to the divers cir-  
 cumstances that concur with it to determine them; and  
 not considering this, doth frequently occasion very  
 gross mistakes, making men think well of themselves,  
 on account of that seeming difference which is betwixt them  
 and others; whereas, perhaps, their actions all the while  
 proceed from one and the same original. If we consider the  
 natural temper and constitutions of men, we shall find some  
 airy, frolicksome and light, which makes their be-  
 haviour extravagant and ridiculous; whereas others are na-  
 turally serious and severe, and their whole carriage com-  
 manded into such gravity, as gains them reverence and esteem.  
 Some are of an humorous, rugged, and morose temper,  
 who can neither be pleased themselves, nor endure others  
 who are so; while others have a sweetness and benignity  
 of their nature, and find the greatest pleasure in the en-  
 joyments of society, and the mutual complacency of  
 friends. And it is well that nature hath provided this  
 selectional tenderness to supply the defect of true cha-  
 rity in the world, and to incline men to do something for  
 another's welfare. Again, in regard of education,  
 we have never been taught to follow any other rules,  
 than those of pleasure or advantage; but others are so

§ The different tendencies of the natural life.

inured

inured to observe the strictest rules of decency and honesty, that they are hardly capable of doing any thing which they have been accustomed to look upon as base and unworthy.

9. In fine, it is no small difference in the deportment of mere natural men that doth arise from the strength or weakness of their wit or judgment, and from their care or negligence in using them. Intemperance and lust, injustice and oppression, and all those other impieties which abound in the world, and render it so miserable, are the effect of the *animal life* when it is neither over-powered by religion, nor governed by natural reason; but if it once take hold of reason, and get judgment and wit to be of its party, will many times disdain the grosser sort of vices, and spur unto fair imitations of virtue and goodness. If a man have so much reason as to consider the prejudice which intemperance and inordinate lust bring to his health, his tune and his reputation, self-love may suffice to restrain him; and one may observe the rules of moral justice in dealing with others, as the best way to secure his own interest, and maintain his credit in the world. But this is not all: this natural principle, by the help of reason, may take a higher flight, and come nigher the instances of piety and religion; it may incline a man to the diligent study of divine truths: for why should not these, as well as other speculations, be pleasant and grateful to inquisitive minds? It may make men zealous in maintaining and propagating such opinions as they have espoused. It may make it a delight to hear and compose excellent discourses about matters of religion; for eloquence is very pleasant, whatever be the subject; nay, some it may dispose to a kind of devotion. The glorious things that are spoken of heaven, the similitudes made use of in scripture, of crowns, sceptres, and rivers of pleasure, &c. will easily affect man's fancy, and make him wish to be there, though he neither understand nor desire those spiritual pleasures which are shadowed forth by them; and when such a person believes that Christ has purchased those glorious things for him, he may feel a kind of tenderness and affection, may imagine he is mightily enamoured with him, and yet all while continue a stranger to the holy temper and spirit of the blessed Jesus.

10. To conclude, there is nothing proper to make man's life pleasant, or himself eminent and conspicuous in the world, but this natural principle assisted by wisdom and reason.



son, may prompt him to it. And tho' I do not con-  
sider these things in themselves, yet it concerns us nearly  
to know and consider their nature, both that we may keep  
within bounds, and that we may learn never to value our-  
selves on the account of such attainments, nor lay the  
burden of religion upon our natural appetites or per-  
formances.

\* It is now time to return to the consideration of  
the divine life, that *life which is hid with Christ in God*,  
and therefore hath no glorious shew or appearance in the  
world, but to the natural man seems mean and insipid.  
The animal life consists in that narrow love which is  
directed on a man's self, and in his propension to those  
things that are pleasing to nature; so the divine life stands  
in an universal and unbounded affection, and in the mastery  
over our natural inclinations. The root of divine life is  
love; the chief branches are, love to God, charity to  
man, purity, and humility: for (as an excellent person  
observed) however these names be common and vulgar,  
yet do they carry such a mighty sense, that the tongue of  
an angel can pronounce nothing more weighty or ex-  
cellent. Faith hath the same place in the divine life, which  
it hath in the natural; being indeed a kind of sense, or  
strong persuasion of spiritual things; it extends itself unto  
divine truths; but in our lapsed estate, it hath a pecu-  
liar relation to the declarations of God's mercy to sinners  
through a mediator; and therefore, receiving its denomi-  
nation from that principal object, is ordinarily termed *Faith  
in Jesus Christ*.

The love of God, is such a delightful sense of God's  
kindness to us, as makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself  
entirely unto him, desiring above all things to please him,  
and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and  
communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any  
thing for his sake, or at his pleasure. A soul thus possessed  
with divine love, must needs be enlarged towards all man-  
kind in a sincere and unbounded affection, because of the  
love they have to God, being his creatures, and hav-  
ing something of his image stamped upon them. And this,  
which I named as the second branch of religion,  
under which all the parts of justice, all the duties we  
owe to our neighbour, are eminently comprehended. For

\* Wherein the Divine Life doth consist.

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he who doth truly love all the world, will be nearly concerned in the interest of every one, and so far from wronging any person, that he will resent any evil that befalls others, as if it happened to himself.

13. By *purity*, I understand such a disposition of mind as makes a man despise and abstain from all pleasures of sense or fancy, which either are sinful in themselves, or tend to extinguish or lessen our relish of more divine and intellectual pleasures. It doth also infer, a resoluteness to undergo all those hardships he may meet with in the performance of his duty; so that not only charity and temperance, but also christian courage and magnanimity, may come under this head.

14. *Humility* imports a deep sense of our inward and outward sins, and of our utter helplessness; which is always accompanied with a profound submission to the will of God, and deadness to the applause of men.

These are the highest perfections that men are capable of; the very foundation of heaven laid in the soul; and he who hath attained them, needs not desire to pry into the hidden rolls of God's decrees, or search the volumes of heaven to know what is determined about his everlasting condition, but he may find a copy of God's thoughts concerning him written in his own breast. His love to God may give him assurance of God's favour to him, and those beginnings of happiness, which he feels in the conformity of the powers of his soul to the nature of God, are a sure pledge that his felicity shall be perfected, and continued to all eternity. And it is not without reason that one said, "I had rather see the real impression of God-like nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or an angel sent to tell me, that my name was enrolled in the book of life."

15. \* When we have said all we can, the secret mysteries of a new nature and divine life can never be fully and entirely expressed. Language cannot reach them; nor can they be truly understood, but by those who have a sensible relish of spiritual things. *There is a spirit in man, the inspiration of the Almighty giveth this understanding.* The power and life of religion may be better expressed by actions than in words: and therefore we may take the measure of those gracious endowments, from the degree

\* Religion better understood by actions than by words.

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ment of those in whom they reside; especially from the life of our blessed Saviour; a main part of whose business in this world was, to teach by his *practice* what he did require of others, and to make his own conversation an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which he described: so that if ever true goodness was visible to mortal eyes, it was when his presence did beautify this lower world.

16. † That sincere and devout affection, wherewith his blessed soul did constantly burn towards his heavenly Father, did express itself in an entire resignation to his will. It was this that was his *very meat, to do the will, and to do the work of him that sent him.* ‡ This was the exercise of his childhood, and the constant employment of his riper age. He spared no travail or pains, while he was about his Father's business, but took such satisfaction in the performances of it, that, when being faint and weary at the end of his journey, he rested on Jacob's well, and intreated the water of the Samaritan woman: the success of his conference with her, and the accession that was made to the Kingdom of God, filled his mind with such delight, as seemed to redound to his very body, refreshing his spirits, and making him forget his thirst, and refuse the meat which he had sent his disciples to buy. || Nor was he less patient and submissive in suffering the will of God, than diligent in doing of it. He endured the sharpest afflictions, the extremest miseries, than ever were inflicted on any mortal, without a repining thought, or discontented word. Though he was far from a stupid insensibility, or a stubborn obstinacy, and had as quick a sense of pain as other men, and the deepest apprehension of what he was to suffer in his soul, (as his *bloody sweat*, and the *fore amazement and sorrow* which he professed, do abundantly demonstrate) yet did he entirely submit to that severe dispensation of Providence, and willingly acquiesced in it.

And when he prayed to God, that, *if it were possible*, (or as one of the evangelists has it,) *if he were willing that cup might be removed*; yet he gently added, *nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.* Of what strange importance are the expressions, John xii. 27, where he acknowledgeth the anguish of his spirit. *Now is my hour.* Divine love exemplified in our Saviour. † His diligence in doing God's will. || His patience in bearing it.

*Soul*

*soul troubled*; which would seem to produce a kind of demur; *And what shall I say?* And then he goes on to deprecate his sufferings, *Father, save me from this hour* which he had no sooner uttered, but he doth, as it were on second thoughts, recall it in these words, *But for what cause came I into the world*; and concludes, *Father, glorify thy name*. Now we must not look on this as any civility: he knew all along what he was to suffer, and most resolutely undergo it. But it shews us the inconceivable weight and pressure that he was to bear; which being so afflicting to nature, he could not think of without terror: yet, considering the will of God, and glory which was to redound to him from thence, he was not only content, but desirous to suffer it.

18. \* Another instance of his love to God was, delight in conversing with him by prayer; which made him frequently retire from the world, and spend whole nights in that heavenly exercise; though he had no sin to confess, and but few secular interests to pray for: which alas! are almost the only things that are wont to drive us to our devotions. Nay, we may say, his whole life was prayer, a constant course of communion with God. His sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the fire never kept alive. Nor was he ever surprised with that dulness of spirit which we must many times wrestle with, before we can be fit for the exercise of devotion.

19. § In the second place I should speak of his love towards all men, but he who would express it must transcribe the history of the gospel: for scarce any thing is recorded to have been done or spoken by him, which was not designed for the good of some one or other. All his miraculous works were instances of his goodness, as well as his power, and they benefited those on whom they were wrought, as well as amazed the beholders. His charity was not confined to his kindred or relations; nor was his kindness swallowed up in the endearments of that peculiar friendship which he carried toward the beloved disciple. But every one was his friend who obeyed his holy commands, John xv. 4; and *whosoever did the will of his Father*, the same was to him as his brother, and sister, and mother.

\* His constant devotion. § His charity to men.

Never was any unwelcome to him, who came with honest intention; nor did he deny any request, which led to the good of those that asked it: so that what was spoken of that Roman emperor, whom, for his goodness, they called the *darling of mankind*, was really performed by him, that never any departed from him with a sorry countenance, except that rich youth, Mark x. He was sorry to hear that the kingdom of heaven stood at so high a rate, and that he could not save his soul and money too. And certainly it troubled our Saviour to hear that when a price was in his hand to get wisdom, he had no heart to it. The ingenuity that appeared in his first address, had already procured some kindness from him; for it is said, "and Jesus beholding him loved him." Must he for his sake cut out a new way to heaven, and alter the nature of things; which make it impossible for a covetous man should be happy?

\* And what shall I speak of his meekness, who did encounter the monstrous ingratitude of that malignant who betrayed him, in no harsher terms than these, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" That further evidence could we desire of his fervent and boundless charity, than that he willingly laid down his life for his most bitter enemies, and mingling his prayers with his blood, besought the father that his death might be laid to their charge, but might become the means of eternal life, to those very persons who procured it.

§ The third branch of the divine life is *purity*, a neglect of worldly enjoyments and accommodations, and a resolute enduring of all such troubles as we meet with in the doing of our duty. Now surely if ever any person was wholly dead to all the pleasures of the natural world, it was the blessed Jesus; who seldom tasted them when they came in his way, but never stept out of his way to seek them. Tho' he allowed others the comforts of the world, and honoured marriage with his presence, yet he chose the severity of a virgin life; and tho' at the same time he supplied the want of wine with a miracle, he would not work one for the relief of his own hunger in the wilderness. So gracious was he in allowing others such gratifications, as himself thought good to abstain from, and supplying not only their pressing

\* His meekness. § His purity.

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necessities,



necessities, but also their less considerable wants. many times hear of our Saviour's sighs, and groans, tears, but never that he laughed, and but once that rejoiced in spirit; so that thro' his whole life he expressed that character given of him by the prophet "A man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs," were the troubles and disaccommodations of his life other than matters of choice; for never did there any appear on the stage of the world with greater advantages to have raised himself to the highest secular felicity. He could bring together such a prodigious number of fish into his disciples net, and at another time receive tribute from a fish which he was to pay to the temple might easily have made himself the richest person in the world: nay, without any money, he could have maintained an army powerful enough to have justled Christ out of his throne, having oftener than once fed several thousands with a few loaves and small fishes: but to how small esteem he had of all the enjoyments in the world, he chose to live in so poor and mean a condition that "tho' the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, yet he who was Lord and heir of all things had not where to lay his head. He did not frequent the courts of princes, nor affect the acquaintance and company of great ones; but being reputed the son of a carpenter, he had fishermen, and other such poor people, for companions, and lived at such a rate as suited with the meanness of that condition.

23. \* And thus I am brought unawares to speak of *humility*, the last branch of the divine life wherein he has set a most eminent pattern to us, that we might "learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart." I shall not now dwell on that infinite condescension of the eternal Son of God in taking our nature upon him; but only reflect on his lowly deportment while he was in the world. He was free from none of those sins and imperfections, which may justly humble the best of men; yet he was so entirely swallowed up with a deep sense of the infinite perfections of God, that he appeared as nothing in his own eyes. I mean as far as he was a creature. He considered those eminent perfections which shined in his blessed soul as not his own, but the gifts of God; and therefore assumed nothing

\* His humility.

himself



himself for them, but with the profoundest humility renounced all pretences to them. Hence did he refuse that ordinary appellation of *Good Master*, from one, who, it is said, was ignorant of his divinity; "Why callest thou me good, there is none good but God only." As if he had said, "The goodness of any creature (and such only takest me to be) is not worthy to be named or taken notice of; 'tis God alone who is originally and essentially good." He never made use of his miraculous power for glory or ostentation: he would not gratify the curiosity of the Jews with a sign from heaven, some prodigious appearance in the air; nor would he follow the advice of his countrymen and kindred, who would have had all the great works performed in the eyes of the world, for giving him the greater fame. When his charity had prompted him to the relief of the miserable, his humility made him many times enjoin the concealment of the miracle; and when the glory of God, and the design for which he came into the world required the publication of it, he ascribed the honour of all to his Father, telling them, "That of himself he was able to do nothing." I cannot insist on all the instances of humility in his deportment towards men; his withdrawing himself when they would have made him a king; his subjection, not only to his blessed mother; but to her husband, during his younger years; and his submission to all the injuries and affronts which his rude and malicious enemies put upon him: the history of his holy life recorded of those who conversed with him, is full of such passages as these; and indeed the serious and attentive study is the best way to get right measures of humility, and all the other parts of religion, which I have been endeavouring to describe.

Let me here subjoin a prayer that might be proper, for one, who had formerly entertained some false notions of religion, begins to discover what it is.

## A P R A Y E R.

FINITE and eternal Majesty, author and fountain of being and blessedness, how little do we poor sinners know of Thee, or the way to serve and

please Thee? We talk of religion, and pretend unto but alas! how few are there that know and consider what it means? How easily do we mistake the affections of our nature, for those divine graces which alone are acceptable in thy sight? It may justly grieve me to consider that I should have wandered so long, and contented myself so often with vain shadows of religion; yet cannot but acknowledge and adore thy goodness, who hast been pleased, in some measure, to open mine eyes, and let me see what it is at which I ought to aim. I rejoice to consider what mighty improvements my nature is capable of, and what a divine temper doth shine in thee, whom thou art pleased to chuse, and causest to approach unto thee. Blessed be thine infinite mercy, who sent thine own Son to dwell among men, and instruct them by his example, as well as his laws, giving them a perfect pattern of what they ought to be. Or that the life of the blessed Jesus may be always in my thoughts, till I receive a deep sense and impression of those graces that shined so eminently in him; and let me never cease till that new and divine nature prevail in my soul, *Christ be formed within me.*

1. **A**ND now having discovered the nature of religion, before I proceed any further, it may not perhaps, be unfit to fix our meditations a little on the excellency and advantages of it. But alas what will we find to express that inward satisfaction, and hidden pleasures which can never be rightly understood but by those who feel them? "A stranger intermedleth not with their joy," Prov. xiv. 10. Holiness is a right temper, the vigorous and healthful constitution of the soul: its faculties had formerly been enfeebled and disordered, so that they could not exercise their natural functions; it had wearied itself with endless tossing and rollings, and was never able to find any rest. Now the distemper being removed, it feels itself well; there is due harmony in its faculties, and a sprightly vigour settles every part; the understanding can discern what is good, and the will can cleave unto it; the affections are not led by the motions of sense, and the influence

\* The excellency and advantage of religion.

external

external objects; but are stirred by more divine impressions, and touched with a sense of invisible things.

2. \* Let us descend into a nearer view of religion, in whose several branches of it, which were named before. Let us consider that love and affection, wherewith holy souls are united to God, that we may see what excellency and felicity is involved in it. Love is that powerful and prevalent passion, by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend. The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love. He who loveth mean and fordid things, doth hereby become base and vile; but a noble and well-placed affection advances the spirit to conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these frequently present to the mind, and, by a secret force and energy, insinuate into the very constitution of the soul, and mould and fashion it into their own likeness. Hence we see how easily lovers or friends slide into the imitation of the persons whom they affect; and how, even before they are aware, they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable instances of their deportment, but also in their voice and gesture, and that which we call their mien and air. And certainly we should as well transcribe the inward beauties of the soul, if they were the object and motive of our love. But as all the creatures we converse with have their mixture and alloy, we are always in hazard to be sullied and corrupted by placing our affections on them: passion doth easily blind our eyes, so that we first approve, and then imitate the things that are blameable in them. The true way to improve and enoble our souls, is by fixing our love on the divine perfections, that we may have them always before us, and derive an impression of them on ourselves: and "beholding, with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory." He who hath raised his eyes towards that uncreated beauty and goodness and fixed his affection there, is quite of another spirit, of a more excellent and heroic temper than the rest of the world; and cannot but infinitely disdain all mean and unworthy things; will not entertain any low or base thoughts, which might dis-

\* The excellency of divine love.

parage his high and noble pretensions. Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we are masters of; and therefore it is folly and baseness to bestow it unworthily. It is indeed the only thing we can call our own; other things may be taken from us by violence, but none can ravi our love. If any thing else be counted ours, by giving it our love, we give all, so far as we make over our hearts and wills, by which we possess our other enjoyments. It is not possible to refuse him any thing, to whom, in love, we have given ourselves; nay, since it is the privilege of gifts, to receive their value from the mind of the giver, and not to be measured by the event, but by the desire, he who loveth, may, in some sense, be said not only to bestow all that he hath, but all things which may make the beloved person happy; since he doth heartily wish them, and would really give them, if they were in his power. Certainly therefore love is the worthiest present we can offer unto God, and it is extremely debased when we bestow it another way.

When this affection is misplaced, it doth often vent itself in such expressions, as point at its genuine and proper object. The blasphemous terms of adoration wherein men sometimes express their passion, and the language for that affection which was designed for God, as he who is accustomed to speak to some great person, doth perhaps unawares accost another with those titles which was wont to give him. But certainly that passion which accounteth its object a deity, ought to be bestowed on him who really is so: those unlimited submissions, which debase the soul, if directed to any other, will exalt and enoble it, when placed here; those chains and cords of love, are infinitely more glorious than liberty itself; that slavery is more noble than all the empires in the world.

4. Again, as divine love doth advance and elevate the soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy. \* The highest pleasures, the most substantial delights, that human nature is capable of, are those which arise from the endearments of a well-placed and successful affection. That which imbitters love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome passion, is the placing it on those who have not worth enough to deserve it, or gratitude to requite it, or whose absence may deprive us of their converse, or whose miseries occasion our trouble. To all these evils

\* The advantage of divine love.

are



they exposed, whose chief affection is placed on creatures; but the love of God delivers us from them all.

\* First, love must needs be full of disquietude, when there is not excellency in the object to answer the fullness of its capacity; so violent a passion cannot but rage and torment the spirit, when it finds not wherewith to satisfy its cravings; and indeed so large and unbounded is its nature, that it must be extremely straitened, when confined to any creature; nothing below an infinite good can afford it room to stretch itself, and exert its vigour and activity. What is a little skin-deep beauty, or some small degrees of goodness, to satisfy a passion which was made for God? No wonder lovers do so hardly suffer for rival, and do not desire that others should approve their passion by imitating it: they know the scantiness of the good which they love, that it cannot suffice two, being in effect too little for one. Hence love, "which is as death, occasioneth jealousy, which is cruel as the sword; the coals whereof are coals of fire, which hath a most violent flame."

But divine love hath no mixture of this gall. When the soul is fixed on that supreme Good, it finds so much goodness, as doth not only satisfy its affection, but over and overpower it too: it finds all its love to be faint and languid for such an object, and is only that it can command no more: it wishes for the wings of a Seraph, and longs for the time, when it shall be wholly melted and dissolved in love; and because it does so little itself, it desires the assistance of the whole creation, that angels and men would concur with it in the adoration and love of those infinite perfections.

† Again, love is accompanied with trouble, when it is without a suitable return of affection. Love is the most valuable thing we can bestow, and by giving it, we do not expect to receive any thing in return: and therefore it must be afflictive, to find so great a gift despised; that is, a present, which one hath made of his whole heart, and obtain any return. Perfect love is a kind of self-sacrifice, a wandering out of ourselves: it is a sort of voluntary death, wherein the lover dies to himself, and to his own interests; not thinking of them, nor caring for them any more; and minding nothing but how he may be the worth of the object. † The certainty to be beloved again, may



may please and gratify the party whom he loves. T he is quite undone, unless he meets with reciprocal affection; he neglects himself, when the other hath no regard to him: but if he be beloved, he is revived, were, and liveth in the soul and care of the person w he loves. And now he begins to mind his own cernments, not so much because they are his, as bec the beloved is pleased to own an interest in them; he comes dear unto himself, because he is so unto the other.

8. And herein the divine lover hath unspeakably advantage, having placed his affection on him w nature is love, whose goodness is as infinite as his b whose mercy prevented us, when we were his ene therefore cannot chuse but embrace us, when we are come his friends. It is utterly impossible that should deny his love to a soul wholly devoted to and which desires nothing so much as to serve and p him. He cannot disdain his own image, nor the heart which it is engraven. Love is all the tribute whic can pay him, and it is the sacrifice which he will despise.

9. \* Another thing which disturbs the pleasure of love, and renders it a miserable and unquiet passion, is absence and separation from those we love. It is without a sensible affliction that friends do part, though for some little time: But if death have made the separation for some time or other: it must, this occasions a grief that cannot be paralleled by all the misfortunes of human life. But O how happy are those who have placed their affection on him, who can never be absent from them! they may shut their eyes, but they shall every where find the traces of his presence and glory, and converse with him whom their soul loveth; and this makes the darkest prison, or wildest desert, not only supportable but delightful to them.

10. † In fine, a lover is miserable, if the person w he loveth be so. They who have made an exchange of hearts by love, get thereby an interest in one another's happiness and misery; and this makes love a troublesome passion, when placed on earth. The most fortunate person hath grief enough to mar the tranquility of his love.

\* The presence of the beloved person. † The divine love makes us partake of an infinite happiness.

end; and it is hard to hold out, when we are attacked  
all hands and suffer not only in our own person, but  
another's: but if God were the object of our love,  
we should share in an infinite happiness, without any  
ixture or possibility of diminution; we should rejoice  
behold the glory of God, and receive comfort and  
asure from all the praises wherewith men and angels  
tol him. It would delight us beyond all expression to  
onsider that the beloved of our souls is infinitely happy  
himself, and that all his enemies cannot shake or un-  
tle his throne: "That our God is in the heavens and  
th whatsoever pleaseth him."

Behold, on what sure foundations his happiness is built,  
whose soul is possessed with divine love, whose will is  
transformed into the will of God, and whose sole desire  
that his Maker should be pleased! O the peace, the  
the satisfaction that attendeth such a temper of mind!  
11. \* What an infinite pleasure must it needs be, thus  
it were to lose ourselves in Him; and, being swallowed  
in the overcoming sense of his goodness, to offer our-  
selves a living sacrifice always ascending unto him in flames  
love? Never doth a soul know what solid joy is, till  
give itself up into the Author of its being, and feel it-  
self become a hallowed and devoted thing; and can say,  
an inward sense and feeling, "My beloved is mine,  
and I am his:" I am content to be any thing for him,  
and care not for myself, but that I may serve him. A  
person moulded into this temper, finds pleasure in all the  
dispensations of providence: temporal enjoyments have  
no other relish, when he tastes the divine goodness in them,  
and considers them as tokens of love sent by his dearest  
lord and master: and chastisements hereby lose their  
sting; the rod, as well as the staff, comforts him: he re-  
joices, that tho' God does not the will of such a worth-  
less and foolish creature as himself, yet he doth his own  
will, and accomplishes his own designs; which are in-  
initely more holy and wise.

12. † The exercises of religion, which to others are  
stupid and tedious, yield the highest pleasure to souls  
possessed with divine love: they rejoice when they are  
called to "go up to the house of the Lord, that they may

\* He that loveth God finds sweetness in every dispensation.

† The duties of religion are delightful to him.

see

see his power and his glory, as they have formerly seen in his sanctuary."§ They never think themselves happy, as when, having retired from the world, they have placed themselves in the presence of God, and obtain fellowship and communion with Him: they delight to adore his perfections, and recount his favours, and to protest their affection to him, and tell him a thousand times that they love him, to lay out their troubles or wants before him, and disburden their hearts to his bosom. Repentance itself is a delightful exercise when it floweth from the principle of love. There is a secret sweetness which accompanieth those tears of remorse, those meltings and relentings of a soul returned unto God, and lamenting its former unkindness.

13. The severities of a holy life, and that constant watch which we are obliged to keep over our hearts and ways, are troublesome to those who are only ruled by an external law, and have no law in their minds inclining them to their duty. But where divine love possesseth the soul, it stands as centinel to keep out every thing that may offend the beloved. It complieth cheerfully not only with explicit commands, but with the most secret notices of the beloved's pleasure; and is ingenious in discovering what will be the most grateful and acceptable unto him. It makes mortification and self-denial cheerful, and their harsh and dreadful names, and become easy, sweet, and delightful things.

14. \* The next branch of the divine life is *universal love* to man. The excellency of this grace will be easily acknowledged; for what can be more noble than a heart enlarged to embrace the whole world? whose wishes and designs are levelled at the welfare of the universe, who considereth every man's interest as its own? He, who loveth his neighbour as himself, can never entertain a base or injurious thought, or be wanting in expressions of bounty. He had rather suffer a thousand wrongs, than be guilty of one; and never accounts himself happy, when some one or other hath been benefited by his love. The malice or ingratitude of men is not able to return his love. He overlooks their injuries, and pities their folly, and overcomes their evil with good; and never designs any other revenge against his most bitter and malicious

§ Psalm lxiii. 2. \* The excellency of charity.

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\* Excell

ous enemies, than to put all the obligations he can upon  
 em, whether they will or not. This inward goodness  
 and benignity of spirit reflects a sweetness and serenity  
 on the very countenance, and makes it amiable and  
 lovely: it inspires the soul with a noble resolution and  
 courage, and makes it capable of enterprizing and effect-  
 ing the highest things. Those heroic actions, which we  
 wont to read with admiration, have, for the most part,  
 the effect of the love of one's country, or of par-  
 ticular friendships: and certainly a more extensive affec-  
 tion must be much more powerful and efficacious.

15. Again: As *charity* flows from a noble and excel-  
 lent temper, so it is accompanied with the greatest satis-  
 faction and pleasure. \* It delights the soul to feel itself  
 enlarged, to be delivered from those disquieting pas-  
 sions, malice, hatred, and envy; and to become gentle,  
 sweet, and benign. Had I my choice of all things for  
 present felicity, I would pitch upon this, to have my  
 heart possessed with the greatest kindness and affection to-  
 wards all men in the world. I am sure this would make  
 me partake in all the happiness of others, their inward  
 endowments, and outward prosperity. And though I  
 should frequently meet with occasions of grief and com-  
 mision, yet there is a sweetness in commiseration, which  
 makes it infinitely more desirable than a stupid insensibility.  
 And the consideration of that infinite goodness and wis-  
 dom, which governs the world, might repress any excess-  
 sive trouble for particular calamities that happen in it:  
 certainly, next to the love of God, that ardent affection,  
 wherewith blessed souls embrace one another, is justly to  
 be reckoned as the greatest felicity of those regions above.  
 And did it universally prevail in the world, it would an-  
 nulate that blessedness and make us taste the joys of  
 heaven upon earth.

16. † A third branch of religion is *purity*; a contempt  
 of sensual pleasures, and resoluteness to undergo those  
 troubles and pains we may meet with in the performance  
 of our duty. Now, the naming of this may suffice to  
 commend it as a most noble and excellent quality.  
 There is no slavery so base, as that whereby a man be-  
 comes a drudge to his own lust. Never can that person  
 be capable of any thing noble and worthy, who is sunk

\* Excellency of piety. † The pleasures that attend it.

in



in the gross pleasures of sense, or bewitched with the gratifications of fancy. But the religious soul is of more sublime and divine temper. It knows it was made for higher things, and scorns to step aside one foot out of the ways of holiness, for obtaining any of these.

17. And this *purity* is accompanied with a great deal of pleasure. Whatsoever defiles the soul, disturbs it.

\* All impure delights have a sting in them, and leave smart and trouble behind them. Excess and intemperance and all inordinate lusts, are so much enemies to the health of the body, and the interest of this present life, that a little consideration might oblige any rational man to bear them on that very score. And if the religious person go higher, and do not only abstain from noxious pleasures, but neglect those that are innocent; this is to be looked upon as any violent and uneasy restraint, as the effect of better choice; his mind is so taken with sublime and refined delights, that he cannot be concerned in these. Any person, that is engaged in a violent and passionate affection, will easily forget his ordinary gratification, will be little curious about his diet, or bodily ease, or the diversions he was wont to delight in. No wonder then, if souls, overpowered with divine love, despise inferior pleasures, and be almost ready to grudge the body its necessary attendance for the common accommodations of life, judging all these impertinent to their main happiness, and those higher enjoyments they are pursuing. As for the hardships they may meet with, they rejoice in them, as opportunities to exercise and test their affection; and since they are able to do so little for God, they are glad of the honour to suffer for him.

18. † The last branch of religion is *humility*; and however, to vulgar and carnal eyes this may appear a base and despicable quality, yet, really the soul of man is not capable of a higher and more noble endowment. It is an ignorance that begets pride; but humility arises from a nearer acquaintance with excellent things, which draws men from doating on trifles, or admiring themselves in the cause of some petty attainments.

I know not what thoughts people may have of humility, but I see almost every person pretending to it, and making such expressions and actions as may make them

\* The delight it affords. † The excellency of humility accounted



accounted arrogant and presumptuous: so that those, who are most desirous of praise, are loth to commend themselves. What are all those compliments and modes of civility so frequent in our ordinary converse, but so many protestations of the esteem of others, and low thoughts we have of ourselves? And must not humility be an excellent endowment, when the very shadows of it are so necessary a part of good breeding?

10. \* Again, his grace is accompanied with a great deal of happiness and tranquillity. The proud and arrogant person is a trouble to all that converse with him, but most of all unto himself. Every thing is enough to vex him; scarce any thing sufficient to content and please him. But the humble person hath the advantage when he is despised, that none can think more meanly of him, than he doth of himself; and as he is less affected with injuries, so he is less noxious unto them. "Contention which cometh of pride," betrays a man into a thousand inconveniences, which those of a meek and lowly temper seldom meet with. True humility begets veneration among all men, whilst pride defeateth its own design, and depriveth a man of that honour it makes him pretend to.

11. And the exercises of humility, which relate to Almighty God, are accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and sweetness. It is impossible to express the delight, which religious persons feel in the low estimation of their soul before God; when having a deep sense of the divine Majesty and glory, they sink (I may so speak) to the bottom of their beings, and vanish and disappear in the presence of God, by a devout and affectionate acknowledgment of their own unworthiness; when they understand the full sense of the Psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!" they can utter it with the same affection. Never did a haughty person receive the praises of men with so much pleasure, as the humble renounce them. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory."

12. Thus I have spoken something of the excellencies and advantages of religion in its several branches.

13. The pleasure and sweetness of an humble temper.

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Let us acquaint ourselves with it, and experience what it can teach us more than all that ever hath been spoken or written concerning it. If we may suppose the soul to be already awakened unto some longing desires after so great a blessedness, it will be good to give them vent and suffer them to issue forth in some such aspirations as these.

P R A Y E R.

**G**OOD God! what a mighty felicity is this which we are called? How graciously hast thou joined our duty and happiness together, and prescribed that for our work, the performance whereof is a great reward? And shall such silly worms be advanced to so great a height? Wilt thou allow us to raise our eyes to Thee? Wilt Thou admit and accept our affection? Shall we receive the impression of thy divine excellencies, by beholding and admiring them, and partake of thy infinite blessedness and glory, loving Thee, and rejoicing in them? O the happiness of those souls that are disentangled from every narrow and particular good: whose understandings are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and their wills enlarged to the extent of thine; who love thee above all things and all mankind for thy sake! I am persuaded, O God, I am persuaded, that I can never be happy, till my corrupt affections be mortified, and the pride and vanity of my spirit subdued, and till I come seriously to despise the world, and think nothing of myself. But when shall it once be? O when wilt Thou come unto me, and satisfy my soul with thy likeness, making me holy as Thou art holy, even in all manner of conversation? Hast Thou given me a prospect of so great a felicity, and wilt Thou not bring me unto it? Hast Thou excited those desires in my soul, and wilt Thou not also satisfy them? O teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake, and perfect that which is begun in me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever, and thou wilt not forsake the work of thine own hands.

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I Have hitherto considered wherein true religion doth consist, and how desirable a thing it is: but when one sees now infinitely distant he is from it, he may perhaps be ready to despond: \* he may sit down in sadness, and bemoan himself, and say in the anguish and bitterness of his spirit, "They are happy indeed whose souls are awakened unto the divine life, who are thus renewed in the spirit of their minds; but alas! I am quite of another constitution. If outward observances could have done, I might have hoped to acquit myself by diligence and care: but since nothing but a new nature can serve, what am I able to do? I could give all my goods to the poor, but cannot command that love, without which this would profit me nothing. This gift of God cannot be purchased with money. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned. I could pine and macerate my body; but I cannot starve my corruptions, nor wean my affections from earthly things. I am many times convinced of my own vileness; but this doth rather beget discontent in me, than true humility; and tho' I should come to think meanly of myself, yet I cannot endure that others should think so too. In a word, when I reflect on my most specious attainments, I have reason to suspect that they are all but the effects of nature; and sin is so powerful, and so deeply rooted in me, that I can never hope to be delivered from the dominion of it. I may toss and turn as a door on the hinges, but can never get clear off; so that all the advantage I can draw from the discovery of religion, is but to see, at a huge distance, that felicity which I am not able to reach; like a man in a shipwreck, who discerns the land, and envies the happiness of those there, but cannot himself get ashore."

These, or such like thoughts may arise in the minds of those who begin to conceive the nature and excellency of religion. They have spied the land, and seen that it is exceeding good, that it floweth with milk and honey, but they find they have the children of Anack to grapple with, many powerful sins and corruptions to overcome, and they fear they

\* The dispondent thoughts of some newly awakened to a right sense of things. † The unreasonableness of these fears.

shall never prevail against them. But why should we give way to such discouraging suggestions? Why should we entertain such unreasonable fears, which damp our spirits, and weaken our hands, and augment the difficulties of our way? Let us encourage ourselves with those mighty aids we are to expect in this spiritual warfare; for greater is He that is for us, than all that can rise up against us. "The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:" for He it is that shall tread down our enemies. God hath a tender regard unto the souls of men, and is infinitely willing to promote their welfare. He hath condescended to our weakness, and declared with an oath, that he hath no pleasure in our destruction. There is no such thing as despair in the bosom of that ever blessed being, whose name and nature is Love. He created us at first in a happy condition, and now when we are fallen from it, "he hath laid help upon one that is mighty to save,"\* hath committed the care of our souls to no meaner person than the eternal Son of his love. Is he that is the captain of our salvation, and who our enemies can be too strong for us, when we are fighting under his banner? Did not the Son of God come down from the bosom of his Father, and pitch his tabernacle amongst men, that he might recover them to the divine life, and restore the image of God in their souls? All the mighty works he performed, all the afflictions he sustained had this for their scope and design: for this did he labour and toil; for this did he bleed and die. "He was with child, he was in pain, and hath he brought forth nothing but wind? Hath he wrought no deliverance in the earth? Shall he not see of the travail of his soul?† Certainly it is impossible that this great contrivance of heaven should prove abortive, that such a mighty undertaking should miscarry. It hath already been successful for the salvation of many thousands, who were once as far from the kingdom of heaven as we. And our "high priest continued for ever, and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God

\* Psalm lxxxix. 19. † Isa. xxvi. 18. ‡ Isa. liii. 11.

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him."\* He is tender and compassionate; he knoweth our infirmities and had experience of temptations. A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."† He hath sent out his holy Spirit, whose sweet but powerful breathings are still moving up and down in the world, to quicken the souls of men, and awaken them unto the sense and feeling of those divine things for which they were made. He is ready to assist such weak and languishing creatures as we are, in our essays towards holiness and felicity. And when once it hath taken hold of a soul, and kindled in it the smallest spark of divine love, will he not preserve and cherish, and bring it forth into a flame, which many waters shall not quench? ‡ Whenever this day begins to dawn, and the *day-star to arise in the heart*, || will dispel the powers of darkness, and make ignorance and folly, and all corrupt affections flee away in the shades of night, when the sun cometh out of his chambers. "For the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. § They shall go on from strength to strength, till every one of them appear before God in glory."\*\*

3. Why should we think it impossible that true goodness and universal love should come to sway and prevail in our souls? Is not this their primitive constitution, their genuine constitution as they come first from the hands of their Maker? Sin and corruption are but usurpers; and tho' they have long kept the possession, yet "from the beginning it was not so." That inordinate self-love which one would think were interwoven with the constitution of our nature, is nevertheless of foreign contraction, and had no place at all in the state of integrity. We have still so much reason left as to condemn it. Our understandings are easily convinced that we ought to be wholly devoted to him from whom we have our being, and to love him infinitely more than ourselves, who is infinitely better than we. And our wills would readily comply with this, if they were not disordered and out of tune. And is not he who made our souls

Heb. vii. 24, 25. † Mat. xii. 29. ‡ Cant. viii. 7. || a Pet. i. 9. § Prov. iv. 18. \*\* Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

able to mend them again? Shall we not be able, by his assistance, to vanquish and expel those violent intruders, "and turn unto flight the armies of the aliens."\*

4. No sooner shall we take up arms in his holy war, but we shall have all the saints on earth, and all the angels in heaven engaged on our side. The holy church throughout the world is daily interceding with God for the success of all such endeavours. And doubtless those heavenly hosts above, are nearly concerned in the interest of religion, and infinitely desirous to see the divine life prevailing in this inferior world, and that the will of God may be done by us on earth, as it is done by them in heaven. May we not then encourage ourselves, as the prophet did his servant, when he shewed him the horses and chariots of fire, "fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be against us?"†

5. Away then with all desponding thoughts. § Undertake vigorously, and rely confidently on the divine assistance, is more than half the conquest: "Let us arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with us." It is true, religion in the souls of men is the immediate work of God, and all our natural endeavours can neither produce it alone, nor merit those supernatural aids by which it must be wrought. The Holy Ghost must come upon us, and the power of the Highest overshadow us, before that holy thing can be begotten, and Christ formed in us. But yet we must not expect that this work should be done without any endeavours of our own; we must not be loitering in the ditch, and wait till Omnipotence pull us thence; no, no, we must bestir ourselves, and exert those powers which we have already received. We must put forth ourselves to our utmost capacities, and then "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."¶ All the art and industry of man cannot form an herb, or make a stalk of corn to grow in the field. It is the energy of nature, and the influence of heaven, which produce this effect. It is God "who causeth the grass to grow, and the herb for the service of man;"\*\* and yet nobody will say that the labour

\* Heb. xi. 34. † 2 Kings vi. 16, 17. || We must do what we can, and depend on the divine assistance. § 1 Chron xxii.

¶ 1 Cor. xv. \*\* Psalm clv. 15.

the husbandman are useless and unnecessary. So likewise the human soul is immediately created by God; it is he who both formeth and enliveneth the child, and yet he hath appointed the marriage bed as the ordinary means for propagating of mankind; and tho' there must intervene a stroke of Omnipotence to effect this mighty change in our souls; yet ought we to do what we can, that we may be more ready to receive the seeds of grace and the dew of heaven. It is true, God hath been found of some, who sought him not; he hath cast himself in their way who were quite out of his; he hath laid hold on them, and stopt their course on a sudden; for so was St. Paul converted in his journey to Damascus. But certainly this is not God's ordinary method of dealing with men: tho' he hath not tied himself to means, yet he hath led us to the use of them; and we have never more reason to expect the divine assistance, than when we are doing our utmost endeavours. It shall therefore be my next work to shew what course we may take for obtaining that blessed temper I have described.

6. \* Now if we desire to have our souls moulded to this holy frame, to become partakers of the divine nature, and have Christ formed in our hearts, we must carefully endeavour to avoid and abandon all sinful practices. There can be no treaty of peace, till once we lay down these weapons of rebellion wherewith we fight against heaven; nor can we expect to have our distempers cured, if we be daily feeding on poison. Every wilful sin gives a mortal wound to the soul, and puts it at a greater distance from God. And we can never hope to have our hearts purified from corrupt affections till our hands are cleansed from vicious actions.

7. And first let us inform ourselves well what those are from which we ought to abstain. \* And here we must not take our measures from the maxims of the world, or the practices of those whom, in charity, we account good men: most people have very light apprehensions of those things, and are not sensible of their fault, unless it be gross and flagitious; and scarce reckon any so great as that which they call precise-

8. We must shun all manner of sin. † We must know what things are sinful.

ness;

ness; and those who are more serious, do many times allow themselves too great latitude and freedom. Alas! how much pride, and vanity, and passion, and humour: how much weakness, and folly, and sin, do every day show itself in their converse and behaviour. It may be they are humbled for it, and striving against it, and are daily gaining some ground; but then their progress is so small, and their failings so many, that we had need to choose an exacter pattern. Every one of us must answer for himself, and the practices of others will never warrant and secure us. It is the highest folly to regulate our actions by any other standard, than by that which we must be judged by. If ever therefore we would *cleanse our way*, it must "by taking heed thereto according to the word of God."\* And that "word which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart,"† will certainly discover many things to be sinful and heinous, which pass for very innocent in the eyes of the world. Let us therefore imitate the Psalmist, who saith, "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips have kept myself from the path of the destroyer." Let us acquaint ourselves well with the holy laws of our religion; let us consider the discourses of our blessed Saviour, (especially that divine sermon on the mount) and the writings of his holy Apostles: with an unbiassed mind may clearly discern those bounds by which our actions ought to be confined: and then let us never look upon any sin as light and inconsequential, but be fully persuaded, that the smallest is infinitely heinous in the sight of God, and prejudicial to the souls of men; and that if we had the right sense of things, we should be as deeply affected with the least irregularities, as now we are with the greatest crimes.

8. || But now amongst those things which we cover to be sinful, there will be some unto which thro' the disposition of our nature, or long custom we are so wedded, that it will be like cutting off

\* Psalm cxix. 9. † Heb. iv. 12. ‡ Psalm xvii. 4.

|| We must resist the temptations.



any time. Alas! and how many, who, in the heat of passion, do violence against themselves, and then repent. Every one of us has some sinful practices. It is not that we are any of us perfect. If the heinous nature of sin cannot affect us, at least we may be frightened by those dreadful consequences that attend it; that same selfish principle which pusheth us forward unto the pursuit of sinful pleasures, may make us loath to buy them at the rate of everlasting misery. Let us therefore accustom ourselves to consider seriously what a fearful thing it must be to offend that infinite Being, on whom we hang and depend every moment; who needs but withdraw his mercies to make us miserable, or his assistance to make us nothing. Let us remember the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, and that after we have taken a few turns more in the world, and conversed a little longer amongst men, we must all go down to the dark and silent grave, and carry nothing along with us but anguish and regret for all our sinful enjoyments. That horror must then seize the guilty soul, to find himself naked and all alone before the impartial Judge of the world, to render an exact account, not only of his more important and considerable transactions, but of every word that the tongue hath uttered, and of the swiftest and most secret thought that ever passed through the mind. Let us represent unto ourselves the terrors of that dreadful day, when "the foundation of the earth shall be shaken, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.\* The present frame of nature shall be dissolved, and our eyes shall behold the blessed Jesus, who came once into the world in all humility to visit and purchase pardon for us, and beseech us to accept of it) now appearing in the majesty of his glory, and descending from heaven "in flaming fire to take

\* 2 Pet. iii. 20.

vengeance on those" that have despised his mercy and persisted in rebelling against him. Then all the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light, and the counsels of the heart shall be made manifest. Then those secret impurities and subtile frauds whereof the world did never suspect us, shall be exposed and laid open to public view; and many thousand actions which we never dreamed to be sinful, or which had altogether forgotten, be charged home upon our consciences with such evident convictions of guilt that we shall neither be able to deny or excuse them. Then shall all the angels in heaven, and all the saints that ever lived on earth, approve that dreadful sentence which shall be passed on wicked men; and those who perhaps did love and esteem them while they lived in the world, shall look upon them with indignation and abhorrence, and never make request for their deliverance.——Let us consider the eternal punishment of damned souls, which is shadowed forth in scripture by metaphors taken from those things that are most terrible and grievous in the world; and yet all doth not suffice to convey into our minds any full apprehension of them. When we have joined together the importance of all these expressions, and added unto them whatever our fancies can conceive of misery and torment, we must still remember that all this comes infinitely short of the truth and reality of the thing.

10. It is true, this is a sad and melancholy subject; there is anguish and horror in the consideration of it; but sure it must be infinitely more dreadful to endure it; and such thoughts as these may be very useful to fright us from the courses that would lead us thither. How fond soever we may be of sinful pleasures, the fear of hell may make us abstain; our most forward inclinations will startle when pressed with that question, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

To this very purpose it is that the terrors of another world are so frequently represented in holy writ. Indeed these fears can never suffice to make any person truly good; yet they may restrain us from much evil, and have often made way for more generous and kindly impressions.

\* 1 Cor. iv. 5.      † Isa. xxxii. 14.

11. \* But it will not suffice to consider those things  
 and again, nor to form some resolutions of aban-  
 doning our sins, unless we maintain a constant guard,  
 and be continually watching against them. Some-  
 times the mind is awakened to see the consequences  
 of a vicious life, and straight we are resolved to re-  
 form; but alas! It presently falleth asleep, and we  
 lose that prospect which we had, and then temptations  
 take the advantage; they solicit and importune us  
 continually, and so frequently engage our consent  
 before we are aware. It is the folly and ruin of most  
 people to live at adventure, and take part in every  
 thing that comes in their way, seldom considering  
 what they are about to say or do. If we would have  
 our resolutions take effect, we must take heed unto  
 our ways, and set a watch before the door of our lips,  
 and examine the motions that arise in our heart, and  
 let them tell us whence they come, and whither  
 they go! Whether it be pride or passion, or any cor-  
 rupt humour, that prompteth us to any design, and  
 whether God will be pleased with it. And if we  
 have no time for long reasonings, let us at least turn  
 our eyes towards God, and place ourselves in his pre-  
 sence, to ask his leave and approbation for what we  
 do. Let us consider ourselves under the all-seeing  
 eye of that divine majesty, as in the midst of an in-  
 extinguisheable globe of light; which compasseth us about both  
 behind and before, and pierceth to the innermost  
 parts of our soul. The sense of the divine pre-  
 sence is a ready means both to discover what is un-  
 lawful, and to restrain us from it. There are some  
 things a person could make a shift to palliate or de-  
 fend, and yet he dares not look Almighty God in the  
 face, and adventure upon them. If we look unto him  
 we shall be lightened; if we "set him always before  
 us" he will guide us by his eye, and instruct us in the  
 way wherein we ought to walk.

a. § This care and watchfulness over our actions  
 must be seconded by frequent and serious reflections  
 upon them; not only that we may obtain the divine  
 mercy and pardon of our sins; but also that we may  
 enforce and strengthen our resolutions, and learn to

We must keep a constant watch over ourselves. § We  
 often examine our actions.

decline

decline or resist temptations. It is an advice worth of a christian, though is first dropt from a heathen, That before we betake ourselves to rest, we new and examine all the passages of the day, that may redress what we find to have been amiss, make the shipwrecks of one day be as marks to direct our course in another. But withal, we must not get to implore the divine assistance, especially against those sins that do most easily beset us: And though it be supposed that our hearts are now not moulded into that spiritual frame, yet methinks these considerations as have been proposed to deter us from sin, may stir us up to some seriousness, and make our prayers against it as earnest, at least, as they are wont to be against other calamities; and I doubt not but God, who heareth the cry of the ravens, will have some regard even to such petitions as proceed from those natural passions which himself hath implanted in us.

13. \* Thus we are to make the first essay for covering the divine life, by restraining the natural inclinations, that they break not into sinful practices. But now I must add, that christian prudence will teach us to abstain from gratifications that are simply unlawful; and that not only that we may secure our innocence which would be in continual hazard, if we should strain our liberty to the utmost point; but also that hereby we may teach our appetites to obey, as prudent parents deal with their children, who cross their wills in many little inconsiderable things to make them manageable and submissive in more considerable instances. He, who would mortify the pride and vanity of his spirit, should stop his ears to the most deserved praises, and sometimes bear his just vindication, from the censures and reproaches of others. He, who would check a revengeful humour, would do well to deny himself the satisfaction of representing unto others the injuries which he hath sustained: and if we would do obedience to our ways, that we sin not with our tongues, we must accustom ourselves to solitude and silence. Thus we may make our appetites more moderate in their cravings, by accustoming them to frequent

\* It is fit to restrain ourselves in many lawful things.

fulsals



falls; but it is not enough to have them under violence and restraint.

14. \* Our next essay must be to possess our minds with a deep persuasion of the vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments. This is an ordinary theme, but alas! how few understand and believe what they say! These notions float in our brains, and come tripping off our tongues, but we have no deep impression of them on our spirit. We feel not the truth, which we pretend to believe. We can tell that all the glory and splendor, all the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, are vanity and nothing; and yet these nothings take up all our thoughts, and engross all our affections. Perhaps sometimes we resolve to be no longer deluded with them; but these thoughts seldom outlive the next temptation. And after we have been frustrated a thousand times, we must continually be repeating the experiment. The least difference of circumstances is enough to make us expect satisfaction in one thing, which we missed in another. But if we had once a real contempt of worldly things, this were a considerable advancement in our way. The soul of man is of a vigorous and active nature, and hath in it a raging and inextinguishable thirst, an immaterial kind of fire, always catching at some object or other, in conjunction wherewith it thinks to be happy; and were it once rent from the world, it would search after some higher object, to satisfy its ardent and importunate cravings. The love of the world, and the love of God, are like the scales of a balance; as the one falleth, the other doth rise. It doth therefore nearly concern us to be convinced of the emptiness and vanity of creature-enjoyments. Let us seriously consider what our reason and faith, our own experience, and the observation of others suggest. Amidst all our pursuits and designs, let us stop and ask ourselves, For what end is this? At what do I aim? Can the gross and muddy pleasures of sense, or a heap of white or yellow earth, or the esteem and affection of silly creatures like myself, satisfy a rational and immortal soul? Have I not tried these things already? Will they have a higher relish, and yield me more contentment

\* We must strive to put ourselves out of love with the world.  
D to-morrow

to-morrow than yesterday, or the next year than the did the last? There may be some little difference between that which I am now pursuing, and that which I enjoyed before: but sure my former enjoyments did shew as pleasant, and promise as fair before I attained them. Like the rainbow, they looked very glorious at a distance; but when I approached, I found nothing but emptiness and vapour. O what poor thing would the life of man be, if it were capable of no higher enjoyments!

15. \* When our appetites and inclinations towards worldly things are in some measure subdued, we must proceed conscientiously to perform those duties which religion doth require, and whereunto it would incline us, if it did prevail in our souls. If we cannot get our inward disposition presently changed, let us study at least to regulate our outward deportment: if our hearts be not yet inflamed with divine love, let us however own our allegiance to that infinite Majesty, by attending his service and listening to his word, by speaking reverently of his name and praising his goodness, and exhorting others to serve and obey him. If we want that charity, and those bowels of compassion, which we ought to have towards our neighbour, yet must we not omit any occasion of doing them good. If our hearts be haughty and proud, we must nevertheless study a modest and humble deportment. These external performances are of little value in themselves, yet may they help us forward to better things. The Apostle indeed telleth us, that "bodily exercise profiteth little;" but he seems not to affirm, that it is altogether useless. It is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is wont to pity our weakness, and assist our feeble endeavours. Nor need we fear the imputation of hypocrisy, though our actions do somewhat out-run our affections, seeing they do proceed from a sense of our duty; and our design is not to appear better than we are, but that we may really become so.

16. † Moreover, let us be often lifting up our hearts to God: and if we do not say that we love

\* We must do those outward actions, that are commanded.

† We must endeavour to form internal acts of devotion, charity, &c.

him

him above all things, let us at least acknowledge that  
 is our duty, and would be our happiness so to do.  
 Let us lament the dishonour done unto him by foolish  
 and sinful men, and applaud the praises and adoration  
 that are given him by that blessed and glorious company  
 above. Let us resign and yield ourselves up unto him a  
 thousand times; to be governed by his laws, and disposed  
 at his pleasure; and tho' our stubborn heart should  
 start back, yet let us tell him we are convinced that  
 his will is always just and good; and therefore de-  
 sire him to do with us whatsoever he pleaseth, whe-  
 ther we will or not.

Thus should we exercise ourselves unto godliness;  
 and when we are employing the powers that we have,  
 the Spirit of God is wont to strike in, and elevate  
 these acts of our soul beyond the pitch of nature, and  
 give them a divine impression.

17. \* I shall mention but two other helps; and the  
 first is, deep and serious Consideration. The assent  
 which is ordinarily given to divine truths, is very  
 faint and languid, flowing from a blind inclination  
 to follow that religion which is in fashion, or a lazy  
 concern whether things be so or not. Men are un-  
 willing to quarrel with the religion of their country,  
 but are seldom at the pains to consider what they pro-  
 fess to believe; and thence it is, that they have so  
 little influence on their practice. Those *spiritless*  
*and paralytic thoughts* (as one doth rightly term them)  
 are not able to move the will, and direct the hand.  
 We must therefore labour for a full persuasion of  
 divine truths, a sense and feeling of spiritual things.  
 Let us urge forward our spirits, and make them ap-  
 proach the invisible world, and fix our mind upon  
 immaterial things, till we clearly perceive that these  
 are no dreams; nay, that all things are dreams and  
 shadows besides them. When we look about us, and  
 behold the beauty and magnificence of this goodly  
 frame, the order and harmony of the whole creation,  
 let our thoughts from thence take their flight toward  
 that omnipotent wisdom and goodness which did at-  
 first produce, and doth still establish and uphold the  
 same. When we reflect upon ourselves, let us con-  
 sider that we are not a mere piece of organized mat-

\* Consideration a great instrument of religion.

ter, a curious and well contrived engine; that there more in us than flesh, and blood, and bones, even divine spark, capable to know, and love, and enjoy our Maker; and tho' it be now exceedingly clogged with its dull and lumpish companion; yet 'erelong it shall be delivered and can subsist without the body, as well as that can do without the clothes which we throw off at our pleasure. Let us often withdraw our thoughts from this earth, this scene of misery, and folly, and sin, and raise them toward that more vast and glorious world; whose innocent and blessed inhabitants solace themselves eternally in the divine presence, and know no other passions but an unmixed joy, and an unbounded love: and then consider how the blessed Son of God came down to this lower world to live among us, and die for us, that he might bring us to a portion of the same felicity, and think how he hath overcome the sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and is now set down on the "right hand of the majesty on high;" \* and yet is not the less mindful of us, but receiveth our prayers, and presenteth them unto his Father, and is daily visiting his church with the influences of his Spirit, as the sun reacheth us with his beams.

18. Let me further suggest some particular subjects of meditation. † And first, if we would love God, let us consider the excellency of his nature and his love and kindness towards us. It is little we know of the divine perfections; and yet that little may suffice to fill our souls with admiration and love. If it be the understanding that directs the affection, certainly the excellencies of the Divine Nature (the traces whereof we cannot but discover in every thing we behold) should not fail to engage our hearts. Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that all-mighty wisdom and goodness, which fills the universe and displays itself in all the parts of the creation, which establishes the frame of nature, and turneth the mighty wheels of Providence, and keepeth the world from disorders and ruin, than with the faint rays of the same perfections which we meet with in our fellow

\* Heb. i. 3. † We should consider the excellency of the divine nature.



features? Shall we doat on the scattered pieces of a rude and imperfect picture, and never be affected with the original beauty? This were an unaccountable stupidity and blindness. Whatever we find lovely in a friend, or in a saint, ought not to engross, but to elevate our affections: we should conclude with ourselves, that if there be so much sweetness in a drop; there must be infinitely more in the fountain. If there be so much splendor in a ray, what must there be in its glory?

19. Nor can we pretend the remoteness of the object, as if God were at too great a distance for our converse or love: "He is not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being." \* We cannot open our eyes but we must behold some footsteps of his glory; and we cannot turn them toward him, but we shall be sure to find his intent upon us, waiting, as it were, to catch a look, ready to entertain the most intimate fellowship and communion with us. Let us consider all that his works declare, or his word discovers of him unto us; and let us especially contemplate that visible representation of him, which was made in our own nature by his Son, who was the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," † and who appeared in the world to discover at once what God is, and what we ought to be. Let us represent him unto our minds, and we find him described in the gospel, and there we shall behold the perfections of the Divine Nature, so covered with the veil of human infirmities. And while we contemplate a Being infinite in power, wisdom and goodness, the author and fountain of all perfections, let us pray that our eyes may affect our heart; ‡ and while we are musing, the fire may burn. §

20. Hereunto add the consideration of God's favour and good-will towards us. ¶ Now, as the word of God is full of the expressions of his love towards man, so all his works do loudly proclaim it. He gave us our being, and, by preserving us in it, doth renew the donation every moment. He hath placed us in a rich and well-furnished world, and liberally pro-

Psalm xvii. 27. † Heb. i. 3. ‡ Lam. iii. 51. § Psalm xxx. 3.

¶ We should meditate on God's goodness and love.

vided for all our necessities. He raineth down blessings from heaven upon us, and causeth the earth to bring forth our provision. He giveth us our food and raiment; and while we are spending the productions of one year, he is preparing for us against another. He sweeteneth our lives with suitable objects. The eye of his providence is always upon us, and he watcheth for our safety, when we are fast asleep, neither minding him nor ourselves. But lest we should think these testimonies of his kindness less considerable, because they are the easy issues of his omnipotent power, and do not put him to any trouble or pain, he hath taken a more wonderful method to endear himself to us. He hath testified his affection to us by suffering as well as by doing; and because he could not suffer in his own nature, he assumed our nature. The eternal Son of God clothed himself with the infirmities of our flesh, and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among men, and wrestle with the obstinacy of that rebellious race, to reduce them to their allegiance and fidelity, and to offer himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them. I remember one of the poets hath an ingenious fancy to express the passion, wherewith he found himself overcome after a long resistance, "The God of love had shot all his golden arrows at him, but could never pierce his heart, till at length he put himself into the bow, and darted himself strait into his breast." Methinks this doth some way adumbrate God's method of dealing with men. He had long contended with a stubborn world, and threw down many a blessing upon them; and when all his other gifts could not prevail, he at last made a gift of himself. The account, which we have of our Saviour's life in the gospel, doth all along present us with the story of his love. All the pains that he took, and the troubles that he endured, were the wonderful effects, and uncontroulable evidences of it. But O that *last*, that dismal scene! Is it possible to remember it, and question his kindness, or deny him our's? Here, here is, we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts. "That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith: that we being rooted and grounded in love, may be able

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\* Eph. iii  
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comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God! \*

21. We ought also frequently to reflect on those particular tokens of favour and love, which God hath bestowed on ourselves; how long he hath borne with our follies and sins, and waited to be gracious unto us; wrestling, as it were, with the stubbornness of our hearts, and essaying every method to reclaim us. We should keep a register in our minds of all the eminent blessings and deliverances we have met with; some whereof have been so conveyed, that we might clearly perceive they were not the issues of chance, but the glorious effects of the divine favour, and the signal returns of our prayers. Nor ought we to embitter the thoughts of these with any harsh or unworthy suspicion, as if they were designed on purpose to enhance our guilt, and heighten our eternal damnation. No, no; God is love, and he hath no pleasure in the ruin of his creatures. If any abuse his goodness, and turn his grace into wantonness, and thereby plunge themselves into a greater depth of guilt and misery, this is the effect of their obstinate wickedness, and not the design of those benefits which he bestows.

22. If we would love all men, let us consider the relation wherein we stand unto God, and the impressions of his image, which are stamped unto them. † They are not only his creatures, the workmanship of his hands, but such of whom he taketh special care, and for whom he hath a very dear and tender regard; having laid the design of their happiness before the foundations of the world; and being willing to live and converse with them to all the ages of eternity. The meanest and most contemptible person whom we behold, is the offspring of heaven, one of the children of the Most High; and, however unworthy he may behave, himself of that relation to God, so long as God hath not abdicated and disowned him by a final sentence, he will have us to acknowledge him as one of his; and, as such, to embrace him with a sincere

\* Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19. † As a help to charity, we must remember that all men are nearly related to God.

and

and cordial affection. What a concern are we wont to have for those that do any ways belong to the person whom we love? How gladly do we lay hold on every opportunity to gratify the child or servant of a friend? And sure our love towards God, would naturally spring forth in charity towards men, did we mind the interest that he is pleased to take in them, and consider that every soul is dearer to him than the material world; and that he did not account the blood of his Son too great a price for their redemption.

23. Again. As all men stand in a near relation to God, so they have still so much of his image stamped on them, as may oblige and excite us to love them. \* In some this image is more conspicuous, and we can discern the lovely traits of wisdom and goodness. And tho' in others, it may be miserably sullied and defaced, yet it is not altogether erased. Some lineaments at least do still remain: all men are endowed with rational and immortal souls, with understandings and wills capable of the highest and most excellent things. And if they be at present disordered and put out of tune by wickedness and folly, this may indeed move our compassion, but ought not to extinguish our love. When we see a person of a rugged humour and perverse disposition, full of malice and dissimulation, very foolish and very proud; it is hard to fall in love with an object that presents itself unto us, under an idea so little grateful and lovely. But when we consider these evil qualities as the diseases and distempers of a soul, which in itself is capable of all that wisdom and goodness wherewith the best saints have ever been adorned, which may one day come to be raised unto such heights of perfection, shall render it a fit companion for the holy angels, this will turn our aversion into pity, and make us behold him with such resentments, as we have when we look on a beautiful body that is mangled with wounds or disfigured by some loathsome disease. And how ever we hate the vices, we shall not cease to love the man.

24. There remains yet another help: and that is fervent Prayer.† Holiness is the gift of God: indeed the greatest gift he doth bestow, or we are capable

\* That they carry his image upon them.  
instrument of religion.

† Prayer another

receive,



ceive, and he hath promised his Holy Spirit to those  
 that ask it of him. In prayer we make the nearest ap-  
 proaches unto God, and lie open to the influences of  
 heaven: Then it is that the Sun of Righteousness doth  
 visit us with his directest rays, and dissipateth our  
 darkness, and imprinteth his image on our souls. I  
 cannot now insist on the advantages of this exercise,  
 the dispositions wherewith it ought to be performed;  
 and there is no need I should, there being so many  
 books that treat on this subject: † I shall only tell  
 you, that as there is one sort of prayer, wherein we  
 make use of the voice, which is necessary in public,  
 and may sometimes have its own advantages in pri-  
 vate; and another wherein, tho' we utter no sound,  
 yet we conceive the expressions, and form the words  
 in our minds: so there is a third and  
 more sublime kind of prayer, wherein the soul takes  
 a higher flight, and having collected all its forces, by  
 long and serious meditation, it darteth itself (if I  
 may so speak) towards God, in sighs and groans, and  
 thoughts too big for expression. As when, after a deep  
 contemplation of the divine perfections appearing in  
 his works of wonder, it addresseth itself unto him  
 in the profoundest adoration of his majesty and glory;  
 when, after sad reflections on its vileness and mis-  
 eries, it prostrates itself before him with the  
 greatest confusion and sorrow, not daring to lift up its  
 voice, or utter one word in his presence: Or when  
 having well considered the beauty of holiness, and  
 the unspeakable felicity of those that are truly good,  
 it panteth after God, and sendeth up such vigorous  
 and ardent desires as no words can sufficiently express.  
 This mental prayer is one of the most powerful in-  
 struments of the divine life; and it may be the Apost-  
 le hath a peculiar respect unto it, when he saith, that  
 the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, making interces-  
 sion for us with groanings that cannot be uttered."  
 I do not so recommend this sort of prayer, as to  
 supersede the use of the other; for we have so many  
 things to pray for, and every petition of this  
 nature requireth so much time, and so great an inten-  
 tion of spirit, that it were not easy therein to over-  
 come them all: to say nothing, that the deep sighs and

† The advantages of mental prayer.

heavings

heavings of the heart, which are wont to accompany it, are something oppressive to nature, and make it hard to continue long in them.

25. \* I shall recommend but one more help; and that is, the conscientious use of that holy sacrament which is peculiarly appointed to nourish and increase the spiritual life, when once it is begotten in the soul. All the instruments of religion do meet together in this ordinance; and while we address ourselves unto it, we are to put to practice all the rules which were mentioned before. Then it is that we make the severe survey of our actions, and lay the strictest obligation on ourselves: Then are our minds raised to the highest contempt of the world, and every grace doth exert itself with the greatest activity and vigor. All the subjects of contemplation there present themselves to us with the greatest advantage: and then, if ever doth the soul make its most powerful sallies towards heaven, and assault it with a holy and acceptable force. And certainly the neglect or careless performance of this duty, is one of the chief causes that be-dwarfs our religion, and makes us continue of low a size.

### A P R A Y E R.

**A**ND now, O most gracious GOD, Father and fountain of mercy, who hast blessed us with the knowledge of our happiness, and the way that leads unto it, excite in our souls such ardent desires after thee, as may put us forth to the diligent prosecution of the other. Let us neither presume on our own strength, nor distrust thy assistance; but while we are doing our utmost endeavours, teach us still to depend on thee for success. Open our eyes, O GOD, and teach us out of thy law. Bless us with an exact and tender sense of our duty, and a knowledge to discern perverse things. O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes, then shall we not be ashamed when we have respect unto all thy commandments. Possess our hearts with a generous and holy disdain

\* The use of the holy sacrament.

those poor enjoyments which this world holdeth  
 to allure us, that they may never be able to in-  
 gage our affections or betray us to any sin. Turn  
 away our eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken us  
 by thy law. Fill our souls with such a deep sense of  
 those great truths which thou hast revealed in thy  
 Gospel, as may influence and regulate our whole  
 conversation; so that the life which we henceforth  
 live in the flesh, we may live thro' faith in the Son  
 of GOD. O that the infinite perfections of thy blessed  
 nature, and the astonishing expressions of thy good-  
 ness and love, may conquer and overpower our hearts;  
 so that they may be constantly rising towards Thee in  
 flames of devout affection, and enlarging themselves  
 in sincere and cordial love towards all the world for  
 thy sake; and that we may cleanse ourselves from all  
 unrighteousness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in thy  
 fear, without which we can never hope to behold and  
 enjoy Thee. Finally, O God, grant that the confi-  
 rmation of what Thou art, and what we ourselves are,  
 may both humble and lay us low before Thee, and also  
 stir up in us the strongest and most ardent aspirations  
 towards Thee. We desire to give up ourselves to the  
 conduct of thy Spirit: lead us in thy truth, and teach  
 us for thou art the God of our salvation. Guide us  
 with thy counsel, and afterwards receive us into  
 glory; for the merits and intercession of thy blessed  
 Son, our Saviour. Amen.

F I N I S.





